

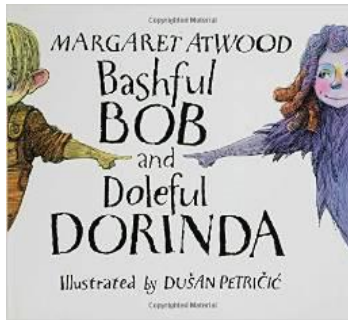
Writing Workshop: Mini-Lesson on Alliteration



This post was spurred on by a recent email someone wrote me. She asked how I get the kids to write in different styles and use different techniques if I don't give different writing assignments. What a great question! I have a couple of different answers for that. Within our writing workshop, the kids choose their own writing projects, but I have found that they have self-selected a wide range of styles, subjects, techniques, and formats. They have written creative stories, memoirs, poetry, non-fiction articles, brochures, letters to friends and family, riddles, codes... they've toyed with similes, metaphors, onomatopoeia and more.

How are they exposed to these different styles, techniques and genres? This happens in part because of our **writing workshop mini-lessons** and in part from **modeling** (I sometimes write poetry or use different writing techniques so they can see how it is used.) I also choose children's literature that models different qualities. One story might have great dialogue or powerful imagery. Another might have a dark mood or interesting characters. Another might focus on memories or on life-lessons (being a good friend, bullying or dealing with loss). We pull out all kinds of lessons from the books we read together at the beginning of Writing Workshop. (Though as I mentioned last week, we also have days when the kids read their own books about writing -- like [Writing Magic: Creating Stories that Fly](#) or [Spilling Ink: A Young Writer's Handbook](#) - affiliate links. I think those authors have some pretty amazing lessons to share with the kids too!).

Let me share one of our mini-lessons from this past week. The book I chose for this mini-lesson was [Bashful Bob and Doleful Dorinda](#) by Maragaret Atwood. (This is an affiliate link.)



I read the book aloud to the kids. After the first two pages, I stopped and asked the kids, "What do you notice about this book?" The kids immediately said, "Everything begins with B!"

"So what literary device is this called?" They paused and thought... and after a hint remembered that it's called alliteration. Then I said, "Okay, so give me a quick example. I went first... "Boomer baked a batch of bone brownies..." (Boomer is our dog!) They gave their own quick examples and then I returned to the story. Bashful Bob not only encounters a boxer, beagle and borzoi but was bewildered by blathering butchers, bun-bearing bakers and belligerent bus drivers. He goes on to meet Dorinda and the story bounces between B's and D's. The vocabulary in this books is impressive and we stopped along the way to explain things like begonia and befuddled, Diphtheria and disreputable dive.

We talked about how difficult it must have been to write a story like this. I asked them, "Do you know any tools that can help you find the word you want that starts with a certain letter?" They didn't, so I explained what a thesaurus is and quickly looked up the word "good" on thesaurus.com and we looked through the words trying to find some B or D words that could be integrated into the story we read.

I asked when writers might want to use alliteration... and we talked about how many poets use alliteration to help set the mood.

Because this was our first mini-lesson in nearly a month (long break, etc.), we talked briefly about the

- characters
- supporting characters
- setting
- mood

I asked the kids first who the main characters were - Bob and Dorinda. Then I asked who the supporting characters were. They named practically everybody and everything else they could think of! So from there we went on to talk about the difference between an antagonist and protagonist... and talked briefly about the lessons each of the characters learned over the course of the book.

When I asked them what the setting was, they spent a few minutes flipping through the illustrations. They said that the book was set in the city "not too long ago." I asked them why they said that and they said, "Well, it's definitely not today because of their clothes and that old-fashioned hair dryer."

The books was a wonderful selection for talking about mood. DD pointed out that it was sad in the beginning but got happier and LD added that it became much more hopeful. We looked closely at the colors the illustrator used (yellow-orange and purple) and talked about how that influenced the mood of the story as well. We talked about how different this book was compared to a Dr. Seuss book with its cheerful colors.

Before we set the timer to start writing, I usually say something like "you might want to try using alliteration in your writing at some point soon." I

try to be vague enough that they don't feel compelled to use it today, but want them to keep it in the back of their minds for sometime in the future. DD in particular often incorporates these techniques into her writing.

Don't miss the first five posts in this series. These have lesson ideas to help young writers get started on their writing journey. You can use them in any order:

1. [What makes a good book or story?](#)
2. [Make your story come alive with details and description.](#)
3. [Creating Interesting Characters](#)
4. [Story Openings: Set the mood or feeling of your story](#)
5. [Gathering story ideas from your own life](#)